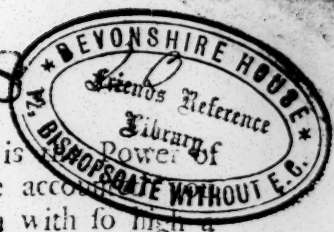


An EPISTLE to FRIENDS



DEAR Friends every where, who suffer Bonds for the Gospel's sake, which is God. It is an Honour which the Lord doth Honour you withal, in that he accounts you worthy thereof; wherefore rejoyce therein, because God hath Honoured you with so high a calling in that it hath been His good pleasure to call you thereunto, which is for your good, yea, for your best good: For these things Dear Friends are for the Tryal of your Faith, and Patience, and that you may be purified, and made clean from all Impurity and filthiness, both of Flesh and Spirit, that you may be made more precious than fine Gold, which hath often passed through the fire, to which *Sion's-Sons* are comparable, and a man comes to be made more precious than the Gold of *Ophire*. God knoweth what is best for us, and therefore it will be good for us to bear with Patience what he in his Divine Wisdom seeth meet to suffer to come upon us, for the Tryal of our Faith and Patience, that our Faith may be more precious than the Gold which perisheth.

Let us be content to follow Christ whithersoever it be, and think no sufferings too much to suffer for his Name sake, who suffered Death for us all, yea for the worst of men, even the Rebellious and ungodly, that he might bring us unto God, in which, saith the Apostle of Christ Jesus, *God commended his love to us, in that while we were yet Sinners Christ died for us*; Was not this love indeed? Doth not the Rich love of God appear towards us herein? And if he honours us by calling us to suffer Tribulation for his Name sake; Let us assure our selves, it is for our profit, and Advantage, and not that thereby we should come to loss, and be destroyed.

Wherefore lift up your Heads, and be glad in the Lord, and strong in the Power of his might, yea let the weak hands be strengthened, and the feeble knees confirmed; who are of a fearful Heart, be strong, fear not; for God will cause these exercises to work for good to us in the End, by holding out, and continuing to the End in the Faith and Patience, by our doing as God hath, and shall give us to believe we ought to do with Patience. Hereby shall we obtain victory over the World, and over him who Rules in the disobedient ones, who are of this World, by him who is not of this World, & hath Chosen us out of the World, and be made through the great love of God to us in him Conquerors, and more than Conquerors such come thereby to be, who are Redeemed from those who get the better one of another by warring and contending one with another, with their Carnall Weapons; who after they have done all that they can in that way of Warring and contending, do many of them end their days in sorrow; but who are made Conquerors through Christ, who hath loved them, & tasted Death for them; their end comes to be happy, the Peace and joy of God being their portion, in which they are blessed forever.

So *DEAR FRIENDS*, think it not much because of the fiery Tryals which you are come to be tryed withal, as if some strange thing had happened unto you, for these things are no otherwise than it was amongst those many Ages and Generations since, who were the called and Chosen of the Lord, who then rejoyced and were glad in the Lord therein, when they were persecuted for Christ's sake, yea in that God did reckon, and account them worthy thereof, and for whose sake they suffered joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they had laid up for them in Heaven, a better and more Indurable Substance, Riches and Treasures, which far exceeded those Earthly Treasures they suffered the spoiling of, which no Robbers nor spoilers could Rob nor spoil them of, wherefore rejoyce in the Lord, and again I say Rejoyce, because with them by your being Faithful unto the Lord God your maker unto the death, you shall be sharers and partakers of these Heavenly Treasures, which will never decay, and so come to receive a Crown of life which fadeth not away.

It was by sufferings Christ Jesus the Captain of our Salvation was made perfect, wherefore being called of the Lord thereunto, as was the Apostle of Christ Jesus, Let us therein rejoyce even as he did, when he suffered for his Lord and Master's sake Christ Jesus, who said to the Saints at *Coloss*; *For whom, for Christ's sake he suffered, who now rejoyce in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the Afflictions of Christ in my Flesh for his Bodie's sake which is the Church; with whom if we suffer with him by continuing Faithfull unto the end, we shall come to reign for ever, who is sit down at the right Hand of Power*; wherefore who have set your Hands to the plow look not back, you that have made a good beginning, continue, and hold on therein, pressing forward to the saving of your Souls.

And you who are at Liberty, viz. who are not Thrown into Prisons and Holes for the Testimony of your pure Consciences towards God, what ever you may suffer, be Faithfull in your Testimony for him in your Meeting together to wait upon him; and in making mention of his Name in Righteousness, and in every good word and work; be ye firm, and steadfast in your Testimony for the Lord, that as thereby you have know the Lord present with you in the midst of you, to your Soules great Comfort, refreshment, and Satisfaction, you may know him so unto you even to the end, and so be your God forever.

And you *My Dear Friends*, who are in Bonds for the Gospel sake, be patient in your Sufferings, according to his Holy and Heavenly Will, not otherwise desiring your Liberty nor Enlargement therefrom, but pray and desire it may be according thereunto; that so in the appointed time of the Father, you may be saved, and delivered by him, out of the Hands of all that hate you; and out of the Hands of all his, and all your Enemys; by that Horn of Salvation, which he hath raised up, and ordained, and appointed in order thereunto; that we might serve him without fear, in Holiness, and Righteousness before him, all the days of our life, dwelling in the Love and Goodwill of the Almighty towards all people, not desiring the Ruin or Destruction of any of them, that you may be like unto your Heavenly Father, who is Good and Kind unto all, even unto the unholy and unthankfull, even unto the worst of men, in sending his Rain upon them, and in causing his Sun to Shine upon them; Oh! Let your Light so Shine forth, that by their beholding the same, they by your good works which they shall behold, may Glorify God on your behalf; So will the Eyes of the Righteous Lord, who Loveth Righteousness and Truth in the Inward parts, be over you for good, whose Eyes run to and fro, to shew himself strong, for them who believe and trust in him; according to whose holy and heavenly mind and will herein and in all things, my prayers are for you, that you may be found to do, that he may delight in you forever.

To whom I do commit you, with my self, to be preserved and kept, as to a Faithful Creator: Hoping, Praying and Desiring, that we may so pass the time of our sojourning here, that when Time shall come to an end with us, Rest and Peace in Eternity with him may be the Portion of our Souls forever.

So desiring that the Blessing of the Most High God, Possessor of Heaven and Earth, may rest upon you, I cease at present from writing unto you, but not from Love, in that which is Pure and Everlasting; In which I remain

Worcester City-Prison, where I suffer Bonds for the
Testimony of a Good Conscience towards God;
the 20th of the 10th Moneth, 1682.

Your Dear Friend and Brother, who are the Called,
Chosen and Faithful of the Lord, whom he hath
set apart for himself:

EDWARD BOURNE.

Let this Epistle be read in the fear of the Lord in the Assemblies of the Righteous every where, both in Bonds & at Liberty.

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